

Aquatic Animal Health Standards Commission

October 2006 Report

CHAPTER 1.4.4.

ZONING AND COMPARTMENTALISATION

Article 1.4.4.1.

Introduction

Given the difficulty of establishing and maintaining for an entire country the status of *free country* for a particular *disease*, especially for *diseases* the entry of which is difficult to control through measures at national boundaries, there may be benefits to one or more Member Countries in establishing and maintaining a *subpopulation* with a distinct *aquatic animal health status*. *Subpopulations* may be separated by natural or artificial geographical barriers or, in certain situations, by the application of appropriate management systems.

Zoning and *compartmentalisation* are procedures implemented by a country under the provisions of this chapter with a view to defining *subpopulations* of distinct *aquatic animal health status* for the purpose of disease control or *international trade*. *Compartmentalisation* applies to a *subpopulation* when management practices related to biosecurity are the defining factors, while *zoning* applies when a *subpopulation* is defined on a geographical basis. In practice, spatial considerations and good management play important roles in the application of both concepts.

This chapter is to assist OIE Member Countries wishing to establish and maintain different *subpopulations*, using the principles of *compartmentalisation* and *zoning*. These principles should be applied in accordance with the measures recommended in the relevant *disease* chapter(s). This chapter also outlines a process through which trading partners may recognise such *subpopulations*. This process is best implemented by trading partners through establishing parameters and gaining agreement on the necessary measures prior to *outbreaks of disease*.

Before trade in *aquatic animals* or *aquatic animal products* may occur, an *importing country* needs to be satisfied that its *aquatic animal health status* will be appropriately protected. In most cases, the import regulations developed will rely in part on judgements made about the effectiveness of sanitary procedures undertaken by the *exporting country*, both at its borders and within its *territory*.

As well as contributing to the safety of *international trade*, *zoning* and *compartmentalisation* may assist *disease* control or eradication within Member Countries. *Zoning* may encourage the more efficient use of resources, and *compartmentalisation* may allow the functional separation of a *subpopulation* from other domestic or wild *aquatic animals* through biosecurity measures, which a *zone* (through geographical separation) would not achieve. Following an *outbreak of disease*, *compartmentalisation* may be able to take advantage of epidemiological links among *subpopulations* or common practices relating to biosecurity, despite diverse geographical locations, to facilitate *disease* control and/or the resumption of trade.

Zoning and *compartmentalisation* may not be applicable to all *diseases*, but separate requirements will be developed for each *disease* for which the application of *zoning* or *compartmentalisation* is considered appropriate.

To regain the status of a *free zone* or *free compartment* following an *outbreak of disease*, Member Countries should follow the recommendations in the relevant disease chapter in the *Aquatic Code*.

Article 1.4.4.2.

General considerations

The *Competent Authority* of an *exporting country* that is establishing a *zone* or *compartment* for *international trade* purposes should clearly define the *subpopulation* in accordance with the recommendations in the relevant chapters in the *Aquatic Code*, including those on *surveillance*, and the identification and traceability of *aquatic animals*. The *Competent Authority* of an *exporting country* should be able to explain to the *Competent Authority* of an *importing country* the basis for its claim of a distinct *aquatic animal health status* for the *zone* or *compartment* in such terms.

The procedures used to establish and maintain the distinct *aquatic animal health status* of a *zone* or *compartment* should be appropriate to the particular circumstances and will depend on the epidemiology of the *disease*, environmental factors and applicable biosecurity measures. The *exporting country* should be able to demonstrate, through detailed documentation published through official channels, that it has implemented the recommendations in the *Aquatic Code* for establishing and maintaining such a *zone* or *compartment*.

An *importing country* should recognise the existence of this *zone* or *compartment* when the appropriate measures recommended in the *Aquatic Code* are applied, and the *Competent Authority* of the *exporting country* certifies that this is the case.

Where countries share a *zone* or *compartment*, the *Competent Authority* of each country should collaborate to define and fulfil their respective responsibilities.

Article 1.4.4.3.

Prerequisite considerations in defining a zone or compartment

The *exporting country* should conduct an assessment of the resources needed and available to establish and maintain a *zone* or *compartment* for *international trade* purposes. These include the human and financial resources and the technical capability of the *Competent Authority* (and of the relevant industry, in the case of a *compartment*) including on *disease surveillance* and diagnosis.

Article 1.4.4.4.

Principles for defining a zone or compartment

In conjunction with the above considerations and the definitions of *zone* and *compartment*, the following principles should apply when Member Countries define a *zone* or *compartment*:

1. The extent of a *zone* should be established by the *Competent Authority* on the basis of the definition of *zone* and made public through official channels.
2. The factors defining a *compartment* should be established by the *Competent Authority* on the basis of relevant criteria such as management and husbandry practices related to biosecurity, and made public through official channels.

3. *Aquatic animals* belonging to such *subpopulations* need to be recognizable as such through a clear epidemiological separation from other *aquatic animals* and all things presenting a *disease* risk.

For a *zone* or *compartment*, the *Competent Authority* should document in detail the measures taken to ensure the identification of the *subpopulation* and the establishment and maintenance of its *aquatic animal health status* through a *biosecurity plan*. The measures used to establish and maintain the distinct *aquatic animal health status* of a *zone* or *compartment* should be appropriate to the particular circumstances and will depend on the epidemiology of the *disease*, environmental factors, the *aquatic animal health status* in adjacent areas, applicable biosecurity measures (including movement controls, use of natural and artificial boundaries, the spatial separation of *aquatic animals*, and commercial management and husbandry practices), and *surveillance*.

4. For a *compartment*, the *biosecurity plan* should describe the partnership between the relevant enterprise/industry and the *Competent Authority*, and their respective responsibilities, including the procedures for oversight of the operation of the *compartment* by the *Competent Authority*.
5. For a *compartment*, the *biosecurity plan* should also describe the routine operating procedures to provide clear evidence that the *surveillance* conducted and the management practices are adequate to meet the definition of the *compartment*. In addition to information on *aquatic animal* movements, the *biosecurity plan* should include production and stock records, feed sources, *surveillance* results, visitor logbook, morbidity and mortality history, medications, vaccinations, documentation of training and any other criteria necessary for evaluation of risk mitigation. The information required may vary according to the *aquatic animal* species and *disease(s)* under consideration.
6. Thus defined, the *zones* and *compartments* constitute the relevant *subpopulations* for the application of the recommendations in Part 2 of the *Aquatic Code*.

Article 1.4.4.5.

Sequence of steps to be taken in defining a zone/compartment and having it recognised for international trade purposes

There is no single sequence of steps which should be followed in defining a *zone* or a *compartment*. The steps that the *Competent Authority* of the *importing country* and the *exporting country* choose and implement will generally depend on the circumstances existing within the countries and at their borders, and their trading history. The recommended steps are:

1. For zoning
 - a) The *exporting country* identifies a geographical area, which it considers to contain an *aquatic animal subpopulation* with a distinct *aquatic animal health status* with respect to a specific *disease/specific diseases*, based on *surveillance*.
 - b) The *exporting country* describes in the *biosecurity plan* for the *zone* the measures which are being, or will be, applied to distinguish such an area epidemiologically from other parts of its *territory*, in accordance with the recommendations in the *Aquatic Code*.
 - c) The *exporting country* provides the above information to the *importing country*, with an explanation of why the area can be treated as an epidemiologically separated *zone* for *international trade* purposes.

- d) The *importing country* determines whether it accepts such an area as a *zone* for the importation of *aquatic animals* and *aquatic animal products*, taking into account:
 - i) an evaluation of the *exporting country's Competent Authority*;
 - ii) the result of a *risk assessment* based on the information provided by the *exporting country* and its own research;
 - iii) its own *aquatic animal* health situation with respect to the *disease(s)* concerned; and
 - iv) other relevant OIE standards.
- e) The *importing country* notifies the *exporting country* of the result of its determination and the underlying reasons, within a reasonable period of time, being either:
 - i) recognition of the *zone*;
 - ii) request for further information; or
 - iii) rejection of the area as a *zone* for *international trade* purposes.
- f) An attempt should be made to resolve any differences over the definition of the *zone*, either in the interim or finally, by using an agreed mechanism to reach consensus (such as the OIE dispute settlement mechanism).
- g) The *importing country* and the *exporting country* may enter into a formal agreement defining the *zone*.

2. For compartmentalisation

- a) Based on discussions with the relevant enterprise/industry, the *exporting country* identifies a *compartment* of one or more *aquaculture establishments* or other premises owned by an enterprise(s) which operates under common management practices related to biosecurity, and which contains an identifiable *aquatic animal subpopulation* with a distinct *aquatic animal health status* with respect to a specific *disease/specific diseases*; the *exporting country* describes how this status is maintained through a partnership between the relevant enterprise/industry and the *Competent Authority* of the *exporting country*.
- b) The *exporting country* examines the *compartment's biosecurity plan* and confirms through an audit that:
 - i) the *compartment* is epidemiologically closed throughout its routine operating procedures as a result of effective implementation of its *biosecurity plan*; and
 - ii) the *surveillance* programme in place is appropriate to verify the status of such *aquaculture establishment(s)* with respect to such *disease(s)*.
- c) The *exporting country* describes the *compartment*, in accordance with the recommendations in the *Aquatic Code*.
- d) The *exporting country* provides the above information to the *importing country*, with an explanation of why such an enterprise can be treated as an epidemiologically separated

compartment for *international trade* purposes.

- e) The *importing country* determines whether it accepts such an enterprise as a *compartment* for the importation of *aquatic animals* and *aquatic animal products*, taking into account:
 - i) an evaluation of the *exporting country's Competent Authority*;
 - ii) the result of a *risk assessment* based on the information provided by the *exporting country* and its own research;
 - iii) its own *aquatic animal* health situation with respect to the *disease(s)* concerned; and
 - iv) other relevant OIE standards.
- f) The *importing country* notifies the *exporting country* of the result of its examination and the underlying reasons, within a reasonable period of time, being either:
 - i) recognition of the *compartment*;
 - ii) request for further information; or
 - iii) rejection of such an enterprise as a *compartment* for *international trade* purposes.
- g) An attempt should be made to resolve any differences over the definition of the *compartment*, either in the interim or finally, by using an agreed mechanism to reach consensus (such as the OIE dispute settlement mechanism).
- h) The *importing country* and the *exporting country* may enter into a formal agreement defining the *compartment*.